

3-18-2013

Already gone

Manuel Fermin Hernandez Marquez

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Hernandez Marquez, Manuel Fermin, "Already gone" (2013). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Thesis/Dissertation Collections at RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.

R•I•T

ALREADY GONE

by

MANUEL FERMÍN HERNÁNDEZ MÁRQUEZ

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
in Imaging Arts

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY
March 18, 2013

Approval:

Patricia Ambrogio
Committee Chair

Date

William Osterman
Committee Member

Date

Clarence Sheffield
Committee Member

Date

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Patricia Ambrogio, my committee chair, and committee members Clarence Sheffield and William Osterman for their support and confidence throughout my studies and the execution of my thesis project. Their advice, life philosophy, and encouragement were pivotal for the completion of this project. I would also like to thank all my professors at RIT for the grains of sand in the form of knowledge and criticism that I received from them—especially Angela Kelly and Carla Williams, my MFA advisors, and Therese Mulligan, CIAS Chair, with whom I worked closely at SPAS Gallery.

I also would like to thank all my classmates, but especially Salah Ahmed, Katherine Driscoll, Ben Gilberg, Sergio Gómez, Luke Shaw, Misha Tulek, and Nick Marshall for their company, friendship, and support.

I would also like to thank the Fulbright program and Mexico's National Council of the Arts for the generous support they gave me so that I was able to fund my studies.

Finally, I would to thank my family for their support, and my beloved Sandra—the cornerstone of my life—whose support and understanding assisted my journey, when she was in my presence as well as when we were miles apart.

ALREADY GONE

By

Manuel Fermín Hernández Márquez

ABSTRACT

Already Gone is a project that explores the relationship of the photographic medium to the concepts of time and history, and the several temporal and historical layers contained within any photographic image. It is heavily influenced by photo-conceptualist practices that were introduced in the 1960s that often employed a de-skilled aesthetic, and questioned photography's intrinsic characteristics, possibilities, and limitations. *Already Gone* is inspired by the ideas of artistic agency in a time where the end of history and the beginning of post-history is proposed, and in the effects the demise of analog photography might have in the indexical nature of the medium. This project is the culmination of ideas about my uneasiness regarding the prevailing uncertainty in contemporary photographic and artistic practice, and my adherence to an approach to art-making based on the everyday as source of inspiration for the creation of work, where awareness is exercised with the ulterior motivation of acquiring consciousness through an artistic process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
List of Figures	v
I. Time, History, and Photography.....	1
II. The Everyday.....	10
III. About the title <i>Already Gone</i>	14
IV. Influences.....	15
V. Explanation of Process and Work Exhibited.....	22
VI. Realization in the Gallery.....	39
VII. Closing Remarks.....	44
Bibliography.....	47

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Mexican Ten Pesos Coin, seen from the side depicting the Aztec calendar.	7
Figure 2. <i>Untitled</i> , from the series <i>Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity</i> , digital chromogenic print (10 x 15cm), 2012.....	9
Figure 3. Images from the series <i>Incisions in History/Fragments of Eternity</i> , digital chromogenic prints (each 10 x 15 cm) 2011- ongoing.	26
Figure 4. Installation View. <i>Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity</i> , 3446 digital chromogenic prints (each 10 x 15 cm), 2012.....	28
Figure 5. <i>February 4, 2012</i> , from the series <i>Fiery Beginnings</i> , analog chromogenic print (40 x 60 cm), 2012.	31
Figure 6. <i>Borges Meets Flusser</i> , book and black ink (15 x 21 x 4 cm), 2012, detail.	34
Figure 7. <i>Untitled</i> , from the series <i>Time as Place, Place as Time: 24 de Junio</i> , analog chromogenic print (20 x 33 cm), 2012.....	35
Figure 8. <i>9:11</i> . Lambda print (60 x 91cm), 2012.....	38
Figure 9. Installation View, <i>Already Gone</i> , 2012.	40
Figure 10. Installation View, <i>Time as Place, Place as Time: 24 de Junio</i> , analog chromogenic prints, inkjet prints (each 40 x 50 cm), 2012.	42
Figure 11. Installation View, <i>Already Gone</i> , 2012.	43

I. Time, History, and Photography

*...I remember the two days that mean a lot to me
I remember the two days, where every hour was a day
And every minute was a lifetime...*¹

– Curve, *Blindfold*

Already Gone is a project that reflects on how the concept of time is represented in the camera arts. Time is an inescapable formal and conceptual element in any work of art, and in some instances it is the subject of the artwork itself. Photography's relationship to time is pivotal since we could say photographs contain it. This relationship works in several layers, and in any photograph we always deal with time in a physical, psychological, social, and personal manner; hence, the concept of history becomes linked with it. Photography always references the past and it serves as a record of previous configurations of reality. Vilém Flusser proposes that photographs are “dams in the way of the stream of history, jamming historical happenings. Thus, the photograph can be considered the first post-historical image”² This capability of marking and materializing time and of defying history's linearity is of great interest to me; the way we can objectify time and contain it in what we call a photographic image is a magical act that reinforces ancient traditions of both mark-making and time-marking.

It is necessary to clarify two pairs of terms that have helped me define the scope of my ideas. On one hand we have the concepts of time and temporality, and on the other the concepts of history and post-history. David Couzens Hoy's study of the concept of

¹ Curve (Musical Group), *Blindfold* (New York: Charisma Records, 1992) Compact Disc.

² Vilém Flusser. *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, xvi.

time through a phenomenological approach proposes that time, or objective time, is an element that serves as backdrop for every experience. It can be divided into categories like natural, historical, or clock time; it is what Martin Heidegger defines as primordial time or *world time*. One of its main features is that it is extraneous. It occurs independently of our apperception of it, residing outside of our mental scenario. Then we have the concept of temporality, a subjective element associated with what Couzens Hoy calls *lived time* or “the time of our lives,”³ an internal time that includes all our inner processes of perception, awareness, and consciousness. He makes this distinction to help us create a conceptual divide of what happens around us and what happens in the realm of our inner mental scenario. This raises the question of what kind of temporal element we are capturing and representing through the photographic act. In any photograph, especially in the ones we produce, it is almost impossible to draw the line between time and temporality, since we are creating simultaneously a personal and a socio-historical document, condensing both world time and our own temporality within it.

The other pair is composed by the concepts of history and post-history. According to Flusser, history can be defined as a linear process or narrative that emerged from the invention of linear writing. It is an account of what he calls *historical happenings*, a description of events that has a strong narrative nature. For Flusser, then, post-history is what happens when all narratives run out, when they are not part of history's linearity anymore, and when, thanks to the entropic nature of history, we can no longer tell or create stories in a linear fashion. Elizabeth Wilson and Andreas Ströhl note:

³ David Couzens Hoy. *Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

Flusser believed that we have entered a transitional period between historical and post-historical thinking. Linear thinking—based on writing and essential to history—is about to be put aside by a new form of thinking that is much more complex, multi-dimensional and *visual* [emphasis added], based on algorithms, and inspired by systems theory and chaos theory.⁴

I believe this transition is actually taking place, altering our understanding of these concepts, as well as our engagement with them. As image-makers, this shift in our engagement with everything involving notions of time and history will affect our practice in unpredictable ways. Flusser finalizes his thoughts by stating that the current dialectic of history creates a condition where “images become more conceptual and texts more imaginative.”⁵ *Already Gone* is an experiment in addressing this new conceptual weight of photographs in this transitional historical period.

Human behavior around photography embeds it with personal and historical weight, and although I consider my work to have the unavoidable historical elements of belonging to a tradition, discourse, and period, I also try to make work that is removed from any pretense of gaining historical understanding through it. According to Flusser, photographs are the first post-historical images because they defy history’s linearity. For him the “temporality of reading photographs is an all-at-onceness, not a linear progression.”⁶ Flusser concludes his research about photography’s limitations as a historic tool by stating that in spite of being a reliable visual record of reality, “the image

⁴ Elizabeth Wilson and Andreas Ströhl, “On the Philosopher Vilém Flusser,” *Weber Studies: An Interdisciplinary Humanities Journal*, 14 -1, Winter 1997, np, accessed December 15th, 2012, [http://www.altx.com/ebr/w\(ebr\)/essays/flusser.html](http://www.altx.com/ebr/w(ebr)/essays/flusser.html).

⁵ Vilém Flusser, “Photography and History,” in *Vilém Flusser: Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 166.

⁶ Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, xvi.

has remained an image. Structurally speaking, it is antihistorical.”⁷ In Rachel Moore’s 2006 book on Hollis Frampton’s (*nostalgia*) (1971), she also addresses this anti-historical characteristic of photographs, by observing that although “photographs absorb and contain time, photographs on their own don’t serve the demands of historical representation, and neither will a chronological account of events.”⁸ This distrust in photography’s worth as an accurate historical record fosters the argument that although photography is a useful tool for marking time and for the creation of temporal bridges, it is severely limited in the way history can be reconstructed from it. Frampton referred to photographs as “Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity,”⁹ and this condition of any photographic document is the most appealing for me. I find Frampton’s metaphor of photograph-as-incision to be somewhat similar to Flusser’s idea of a historical dam. Both descriptions propose that photographs upset the linear and steady flow of history, and we could even go beyond this idea and claim they also disrupt our own temporality, our *lived life*. One of the issues I try to address with my work is the dialectic between the historical and the personal, by exploring how time and temporality reside and conflict in the photographs we produce. My point of departure as an artist is the following: I give myself the agency to act as a *historical unit of measure*, so all the images I produce become a proof of lived experience as well as proof of all the social/historical and the natural/cosmic spheres which they also belong to.

⁷ Flusser, “Photography and History,” 128.

⁸ Rachel Moore, *Hollis Frampton: (nostalgia)* (London: Afterall Books, 2006), 16.

⁹ Hollis Frampton, “Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity,” in *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*, ed. Bruce Jenkins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 33. Frampton uses these terms as the title of his essay.

During my undergraduate studies I became interested in the technical and optical rendering of time in photosensitive surfaces (whether analog or digital) and I made several image series that revolved around the idea of the accumulation of time in photographs. Most of these series consisted of long-exposure imagery. In retrospect, I think of that work as having been motivated by an interest in photography's technical capabilities, and it was a somewhat formal exploration of how time can be recorded and rendered by photographs. However, during my first year in the MFA program at RIT, I felt a certain freedom I had never experienced. I was being exposed to artwork and ideas I had never seen or heard. I was looking at books and getting to know photographers and artists using photography in challenging ways, and most importantly, seeing bodies of work that dealt with creative and conceptual motivations that went beyond a discussion of photographic technique and the modernist view of photographic aesthetic, a view that, to some degree, prevailed over and influenced my formative years in Mexico (a country known for a deep and well-established tradition of photojournalism and documentary photography). It was at this point that new possibilities opened in relation to my photographic practice. I would describe this defining moment in terms of the image of a levee breaking and water running wildly in all directions. I realized that contemporary artistic practice is flexible and fluid, so I started a process of merging all of my interests into my body of work in order to integrate more aspects of my worldview within it, including my interest in timekeeping, calendars, mysticism, and numerology. It was both a liberating and a frightening moment, and the artistic process that this realization led to has been both challenging and intense. This two-year process takes a final form in

Already Gone, although in more than one way, ironically, it feels more like the beginning of something rather than the end.

My interest in timekeeping and calendars stems from a childhood fascination with maps and numbers. I have long thought of calendars as temporal maps, powerful and subtle numerical and abstract structures that can also be represented graphically. Calendars divide and measure time, a weightless and fluid universal phenomenon, and one of the most elusive of concepts; defining what time is has been a task that has challenged and baffled thinkers and scientists for millennia. Growing up in Mexico, I was taught from an early age about pre-Hispanic cultures, and I absorbed the remnants of their worldview and knowledge in a diluted and sometimes distorted way. The concept of time was an obsession in pre-Hispanic Mexico, where pyramids, sculptures, and whole cities were built with temporal concerns in mind. These elements are present in everyday culture in subtle ways. The Mexican ten pesos coin has the national emblem on one side, an eagle devouring a snake, and a representation of the Aztec calendar on the other. So even though a very important aspect of Aztec culture is used as a decorative element in a piece of currency, it remains an example of how ancient cosmogony still permeates the present. Among the calendar systems employed by pre-Hispanic civilizations, the Mayan calendar attracted a great deal of attention in Western culture due to the fact that a fifty-two-thousand-year cycle came to an end in December 2012. New Age thinker José Argüelles proposed this cycle, and a smaller one consisting of 5,200 years, to correspond to the historic period of human evolution.¹⁰ This echoes Flusser's idea of a shift and our passage into the uncharted realm of post-history. These connections, although not

¹⁰ José Argüelles, *The Mayan Factor: The Path Beyond Technology* (Santa Fe: Bear, 2007).

scientific or verifiable, create a narrative that has influenced my artistic practice. Ideas of endings and beginnings, of cycles and repetition, days and years, and their influence on everyday life, have become the backdrop against which my work rests.



Figure 1. Mexican Ten Pesos Coin, seen from the side depicting the Aztec calendar.

A generation of visual artists active in the 1960s had a deep interest in the concept of time that resembled the pre-Hispanic obsession with it. Pamela Lee studied this phenomenon in her book *Chronophobia: On Time in the art of the 1960s* (2004), in which she proposes that several artists active in that decade showed

a pervasive anxiety I describe as *chronophobic*: as registering an almost obsessional uneasiness with time and its measure. Cutting across movements, and genres, the chronophobic impulse suggests an insistent struggle with time, the will of both artists and critics either to master its passage, to still its acceleration, or to give form to its changing condition.¹¹

My admiration for the art of that decade became the common denominator for all the work I presented in *Already Gone*. My work represents a revision as well as a homage to creative strategies employed by conceptual artists in the 1960s, while expressing an interest in the role photography has had in this transition to a post-historical period. The strategy I employed to achieve this was that of placing the utmost importance in

¹¹ Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960's* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), xii.

photography's temporal aspect, where a photographic image serves as a mark in a calendar, hence becoming an indexical record of a day in history as well as a day of my lived life. This approach is a free interpretation of the Barthesian premise of photographic indexicality, my focus being on what I would call a *temporal* indexicality rather than a physical one. Traditional photographic genres would place this impulse in the category of a visual journal or visual diary, but in my case, the creation of this journal has a conceptual motivation rather than a personal one. I started to use artistic strategies from the 1960s and 1970s, a period where photoconceptualism emerged and the use of photography shifted in the art world. For Jeff Wall, "photoconceptualism was able to bring new energies from the other fine arts into the problematic of art-photojournalism."¹² One of the most important features of this line of work was that of the *amateurization* of creative photographic production, which led to "experimentation with the anti-aesthetic, with the look of non-art ... and with the loss of the visual."¹³ This led to the emergence of a deadpan style that has indifference and detachment as its main motivation. In my opinion, this indifference is a result of an attitude towards image-making that is engendered by post-historical thinking and by the fullness of photographic history. Puerto Rican multi-disciplinary artist and scholar Ernesto Pujol has put it beautifully by stating that at this point in history "there is enough art [in the world]," and noting that "[I am] feeling no pressure to create more art, so that what excites me is to

¹² Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," in Douglas Fogle, *The Last Picture Show: Artists using Photography, 1962 - 1982* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 35.

¹³ Wall, "Marks of Indifference," 40.

create something ambiguous, something liminal, that has the effect of art, regardless of its final label.”¹⁴



Figure 2. *Untitled*, from the series *Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity*, digital chromogenic print (10 x 15cm), 2012.

¹⁴ Ernesto Pujol, “Our Barefoot Practice”, in *Learning Mind: Experience into Art*, eds. Mary Jane Jacob and Jacqueline Baas (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 61.

II. The Everyday

The fullness and the ambiguity Pujol reflects on plays an important part in art-making nowadays, where banal or everyday gestures or moments are elevated to the category of art. That is why the everyday is also an important element in *Already Gone*. First and foremost, the everyday deals with the process of fragmentation, progression, and accumulation of time (seconds, minutes, weeks, months, seasons, years, centuries). It also deals with our temporality, our *lived time*, and it has become a subject of concern for contemporary artistic practice that includes approaches that range from obsession to fear. Henri Lefebvre claims that the “everyday is the most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden.”¹⁵ One of the problems that immediately arise by making work based on everyday life is repetition and flatness. Temporally, Lefebvre suggests the everyday is “situated at the intersection of two modes of repetition: the cyclical, which dominates in nature, and the linear, which dominates in processes known as ‘rational.’”¹⁶ The everyday deals with “cycles, night and day, seasons and harvests, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction, desire and its fulfillment, life and death, and it implies on the other hand the repetitive gestures of work and consumption.”¹⁷ Several schools of thought and societies put different values on the notion of “day” and propose different concepts about its definition and purpose. Views range from defining it as a 24-hour physical measure or a calendrical historical unit, to a mystical opportunity for the acquisition of consciousness.

¹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, “Everyday and Everydayness,” in *The Architecture of the Everyday*, eds. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), Kindle Edition, location 777.

¹⁶ Lefebvre, “Everyday and Everydayness,” location 794.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The tradition of the Fourth Way¹⁸ puts the everyday as the battleground where we fight for achieving higher degrees of consciousness and knowledge, since it is within the confines of the everyday that we can engage in activities of self-observation, meditation, change, and awareness. It is the realm where we experience all our personal victories and defeats.

To expand on the idea of the everyday as a source for creative production and how we deal with it both on a personal and on an artistic level, Lefebvre's thoughts on the contradictory nature of the concept of the everyday are helpful. According to him

The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet—here lies the contradiction of the everyday—everything changes. But this change is programmed: obsolescence is planned. Production produces change in such a way as to superimpose the impression of speed onto that of monotony. Some people cry out against the acceleration of time, others cry out against stagnation. They're both right.¹⁹

Martin Heidegger also describes the everyday by defining the term “average everydayness.”²⁰ Michael Inwood insists that for Heidegger “our condition of average everydayness is one of fallenness and ambiguity.”²¹ Heidegger believed that “Falling prey to the “world” means being absorbed in being-with-another, guided by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity.”²² It is in essence, the opposite of the spectacular, the relevant, and the newsworthy, which is what we are used to look for or trained to photograph.

However, the territory of average everydayness is also where we are able to be conscious,

¹⁸ Piotr Diemanov Ouspensky, *The Fourth Way* (London: Vintage Books, 1971). The Fourth Way refers to a concept used by G.I. Gurdjieff to describe an approach to self-development that combined what he saw as three established traditional “ways,” or “schools” into a fourth way. These three ways were of the body, mind and emotions.

¹⁹ Lefebvre, “Everyday and Everydayness,” location 803.

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 170.

²¹ Michael J. Inwood, *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53.

²² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 170.

to engage in what he refers to as *moments of vision*, intermittent moments where we hear the call of consciousness. Heidegger uses the term *Augenblick*²³—literally “eye-glance” in German—to refer to these significant moments, defining them as the “*moments of vision* in which resolute *Dasein*²⁴ assesses the possibilities implicit in its situation and makes decisive choices.”²⁵ The decisive choices I choose to make in the course of my average everydayness are mostly aesthetic, and they take the form of photographs. For Heidegger, everydayness is “after all, precisely the being ‘between’ birth and death,”²⁶ where we are situated in “average modes of existing.”²⁷

The everyday is a source for making art inspired by the gesture of “drawing from the vast reservoir of normally unnoticed, trivial, and repetitive actions comprising the common ground of daily life”.²⁸ It stems from a desire to “bring these uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility.”²⁹ Several contemporary artists [Sam Hsieh, Adrian Piper, Shomei Tomatsu, and Tacita Dean, to name a few] have engaged in a practice inspired by the banality of everyday life, instead of pursuing more spectacular sources of inspiration. This type of work focuses on blurring the dividing line between art and life. At this point, as a visual artist, I am adhering to this aesthetic discourse and its history. This approach inspired me to make art based on that daily struggle for agency, awareness, and creativity amidst the regular course of life, effected

²³ Ibid., 338.

²⁴ “Dasein: To be there (in non-Heideggerian German: to exist); being there, human being. Heidegger uses Dasein to refer both to the (concrete) human being and to its (abstract) being human. Dasein usually refers to an entity, the human being.” Michael J. Inwood, *Heidegger: A Short Introduction*. Kindle edition, loc. 2233.

²⁵ Inwood, *Heidegger*, 82.

²⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 170.

²⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 338.

²⁸ Stephen Johnstone, ed., introduction to *The Everyday* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 12.

²⁹ Ibid.

and conditioned by my activities in graduate school, living in the United States, and by the very intense personal experiences derived from being out of my comfort zone, far from home, family, and friends.

III. About the title *Already Gone*

The title *Already Gone* reflects on this issue, on a yearning for wasted, lost, and lived time; and on the mood surrounding the inevitably finite nature of my stay in the U.S. that was embedded in each of my days. It is both a personal and a formal comment. Personally, it addresses the fact that I am presenting a body of work in a country in which I don't live anymore (I returned to Mexico in summer 2012); and formally, it refers to the fact that in every photograph or film/video frame, the represented moment has already been lost and incorporated into the category of lost but recorded time. Any record we look at, whether it is a video, an audio recording, a photograph, or a text, belongs to the past. They are what George Kubler refers to as *relayed signals*, vessels of information that get temporally dislocated as time progresses given that “the nature of a signal is that its message is neither here nor now, but there and then.”³⁰

Already Gone is also a verbal construction that does not have an easy translation into Spanish. This fact interested me, and it represents how different languages can assist us to articulate thoughts differently. This project was conceived in English and somehow with an American mindset, during a period when I was talking about it in English at the same time as I was being mentored and critiqued in an American context. I was also interested in the several possible meanings of the word “gone,” since in English it might refer to a condition of absence, or to an idea of completion, termination, or death.

³⁰ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 17.

IV. Influences

The inspiration for adhering to a photoconceptualist artistic practice came from visual artists working in the 1960s: specifically, On Kawara, John Baldessari, and Douglas Huebler; from influential writer/artists such as Jeff Wall, Robert Smithson, and Hollis Frampton; from authors like Flusser and Italo Calvino; and most profoundly, from the Mexican visual artist Gabriel Orozco. Orozco has been a pivotal inspiration for my work, in part, for being an example of a successful Mexican contemporary artist, one of the first to be accepted into the international art scene and who applies a sophisticated aesthetic discourse without losing connection with his *Mexicanicity*. This is an inspiration and a model for art-making to which I can relate and want to contribute. Orozco's main themes are gravity and time, with an approach based on the exploration of the readymade, installation, and photographic work. It shows a clear interest for the three-dimensional sculptural nature of materials. We can see this concern for the corporeal in his photographic work, which is often used as a tool to document his sculptural interests. With respect to photography, he considers it an "excuse to look at things," and he believes "the camera is a way of awareness."³¹ Orozco's practice is based on a photographic exploration of the everyday with its temporal intricacies in mind. He notes that

the division between work and everyday life is very strong, in Mexico its the same, and that space between work and life is the space that is very hard to negotiate for everybody: leisure time, pleasure time, knowledge time or research time, that space that is a leftover because the important thing is to work and then to sustain your life or something, but then all the spaces in between are a bit lost,

³¹ PBS, *Art 21*, "Segment Gabriel Orozco," in *Loss & Desire*, 10/09/2003, accessed April 20, 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/watch-now/segment-gabriel-orozco-in-loss-desire>.

so every citizen has to fight for those spaces. When you live and you work in the same place, everything is part of the work, every furniture is important, every little thing, even the trash.³²

Regarding his use of photography, Orozco explains:

For me, photography is like a shoebox; it is a container I use to transport what I pick up in my interactions. I am not specially drawn to photographic compositions; the object of my interest is almost always in the middle ground or in the totality.... I value the plane of the photograph in its description of the three-dimensional and its possible space for storing time.³³

The previous statement clearly demonstrates Orozco's interest both in an implied three-dimensionality in photography and in its temporal dimension. It was only recently that I realized that I have been employing a somewhat similar strategy of using photography as a time-storage device, and that my work has confronted this issue head on. However, I am also interested in the historical dimension of photography, a dimension that has been explored by other visual artists such as Frampton, Smithson, and Kawara.

The Japanese painter On Kawara is another strong influence and inspiration. I regard his work as a treatise on time and meditation. He has established a creative method founded on the ironic use of text, materialized in paintings, photographs, readymades, and books. He employs these objects as vessels of information into which he compresses time through record-keeping gestures; deliberately inserting dates in his work, encompassing unusual time-spans that make the viewer question notions of the present, of duration, and of the temporality that objects might represent. He has been working on his *Today Series* (1964-ongoing) for nearly fifty years. The way Kawara compresses

³² Ibid.

³³ Gabriel Orozco and Yve-Alain Bois, *Gabriel Orozco: The October Files* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 101.

time into an object is well defined in his ten-book series *One Million Years* (1969), in which he typed in chronological order a million years into the past. In this work, every page contains a list of one thousand years, and every book a hundred thousand years, literary compressing one million years in history in a thousand pages.

All of Kawara's works refer to a certain point in Western history (a year, a date, or a time of the day, according the Gregorian calendar), hence becoming doubly temporal objects. They have the temporality that every work of art has as such, while at the same time, they always refer to specific dates, years, or times of the day. This detached way of marking time is devoid of any nostalgic or personal element; this effacement of the author represents Kawara's unequivocal style, since he is always using the impersonal and objective vocabulary of Heidegger's *world time*, moving away from his own temporality. His temporality (or in Couzens Hoy's words, his *lived life*) is only implied in the fact that he is alive and making work; yet, ironically, he is almost always absent from his art openings and he adamantly refuses to be photographed. His rigorous indexical approach is flawless and unique, but the more personal narratives created by other artists like Frampton bring to the table of the art world the author's temporality, which also interests me.

Frampton developed a body of work that examines photography and film's relation to time, and he theorized about their own temporality. He is another major influence. Unlike Kawara, Frampton wasn't interested in the numerical or calendrical nature of time. He was more interested in the notion of temporality or *lived life* that

connected the camera arts to the concepts of narrative and history. His film (*nostalgia*) (1971) deeply moved me, and I consider his conceptual approach to the subject of time in the camera arts (as exhibited in this film) unparalleled in the history of both photography and film. In (*nostalgia*) we see a series of photographs burn slowly while a narrator (the Canadian artist Michael Snow) describes the content of the next photograph to appear on the film (the first photograph on screen is never described). Frampton then establishes a dialectic of confusion between still photography, the moving image, and speech—and he addresses the temporality of these three mediums by deconstructing it. Moore declares that (*nostalgia*) “digs deeply into the affinity of time with consciousness.”³⁴ This gesture is executed with very modest means and in a very calm, almost surgical manner. As a photographer and writer, Frampton was concerned with the concepts of time and history, and his insights about the documentary, narrative, and historical nature of the camera arts became a model and a starting point for my artistic practice.

Another artist who became an important influence is Douglas Huebler. As is the case for several artists active in the 1960s, time is also central for him, especially in his *Duration Pieces* (1964-1997) and in his several written statements. He employed a strategy of setting parameters from which the creation of the visual work depended (as is the case in my series entitled *9:11*). This established him as one of the founding fathers of photoconceptualism. I share with him an interest in the indexical nature of photography. His work “referred to past events via a combination of indexical traces (photographs) and printed matter (written language).”³⁵ Huebler “used random spatial and temporal rules for

³⁴ Moore, *Hollis Frampton: (nostalgia)*, 5.

³⁵ Peter Osborne, ed., *Conceptual Art* (New York: Phaidon, 2002), 29.

the production of his photographic documentation ... in order to avoid 'aesthetic' composition of scenes"³⁶.

Huebler's views regarding the use of text in the production of visual work made me comfortable with the inclusion of text in my work. He stated, "People deny words have anything to do with art. I don't accept that. They do. Art is a source of information."³⁷ Thanks to Huebler, I stopped considering text as an element that somehow compensated for something lacking in my photographic images. Generally speaking, in works of art that are composed of a linguistic element in conjunction with images, we find that "...their linguistic expression confers a participatory dimension to the work, requiring its audience to 'complete it'.... Such open-ended imaginative completion both clinches the conceptual character of the work and challenges the modernist conception of the artwork as an autonomous or self-sufficient entity."³⁸ I find this approach increasingly interesting at this point in my practice, since now I don't see a clear differentiation in the type of work I want to produce. All my work falls in the category of art-as-information that Huebler proposes.

Lastly, among the several other artists I admire and reference in my work, Robert Smithson deserves to be mentioned in more depth as an inspiration for *Already Gone*. Like in the case of Frampton, Smithson's influence is two-fold, since I feel indebted to his visual work and his writing in different but significant degrees. First, time was one

³⁶ Ibid., 30.

³⁷ Douglas Huebler, "Statement (1969: Douglas Huebler)". UbuWeb Papers, accessed December 20, 2012, http://www.ubu.com/papers/huebler_statements.html.

³⁸ Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, 23.

Smithson's main subjects, and he made work and wrote about the temporal and entropic aspects intrinsic to works of art, materials, museums, and sites. Regarding his use of photography in his series *Monuments of the Passaic* (1967), Peter Osborne suggests "Smithson's *Monuments* exhibits an extraordinary capacity to refigure everyday experience, endowing it with artistic meaning, via the strategic deployment or refunctioning of the photojournalistic form."³⁹ I admire the way he employed photography to articulate his insights upon the nature of the monumental. Nicholas Muellner proposes photographs and monuments share some qualities by interpreting Smithson's work. In his view, photographs also have a monumental quality as they memorialize events, places, or people in a way similar to actual monuments. For Muellner, photographs and monuments "are both attempts to stop, or restore, that racing away of meaning from subject, place and time."⁴⁰ He also reflects on how in the 1960s several artists, including Smithson, questioned the necessity of art to be expressed in an object, and suggests these artists tried to "remove the object entirely," and attempted to transform works of art "into something temporal, linguistic or imaginary."⁴¹ He later considers that the images in Smithson's *Monuments of the Passaic* (1967) show the "powerful way the photograph enacts the tug between always meaning something and meaning nothing at all."⁴²

I consider every photograph taken for my project as a sort of monument to the day it was taken, and most of my work tries to evoke ideas about the concepts of time and

³⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Muellner, *The Photograph Commands Indifference* (Ithaca: A-Jump Books, 2008), vi.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² Ibid., 2.

photography by transferring the monumental qualities of photography from its physical element to its temporal one, making them memorials to the day the images are made. Smithson's influence is particularly felt in my series entitled *Time as Place, Place as Time: 24 de Junio*, in which I present photographic images from a roadside restaurant in Oaxaca, Mexico, using photography as a tool for documentation of a site from which a narrative will be developed. The images are accompanied by a text that addresses the monumental aspect of the photographic medium. This strategy is similar to what Smithson did in *Hotel Palenque* (1972) and *Monuments of Passaic* (1967).

V. Explanation of Process and Work Exhibited

DELIRIUM: Um, What's the name for the word for things not being the same always? You know. I'm sure there IS one, Isn't there? There must be a word for it.... the thing that lets you know TIME is happening. Is there a word?

RUBY: Beats me, Hon.

DREAM: Change.

*DELIRIUM: Oh. I was afraid of that.*⁴³

–Neil Gaiman. *Sandman: Brief Lives*

In *Already Gone* I employed photography as a source for art-making that dealt with no specific subject, but that talked about the medium itself. All the work in the project has a conceptual motivation and meaning, and most of my work has a literary element as well. In *Already Gone* I compiled my views in regards to the temporal and indexical nature of the photographic medium, and connected them to my personal history and to the creation of narratives that dealt with the subjects of time, temporality, history, and the everyday.

Aesthetically, the *de-skilled* aesthetic adopted by that 1960s generation of photoconceptualist artists suits my predilection while taking pictures. This style helps me to realize that the aesthetic value of a photograph lies in the mere fact of *being a photograph* and not in the qualities for which photographs are normally valued. There is also an interest in the use of multiple images to point out visual or thematic patterns, from which narratives emerge. I am achieving this by building a personal archive instead of approaching other resources for image acquisition for my project, moving away from

⁴³ Neil Gaiman, *Sandman: Brief Lives* (New York: DC Comics, 1994), np.

contemporary strategies of appropriation. There is an *Atgetian*⁴⁴ motif in the content of my images as well. Walter Benjamin discusses Eugène Atget photographed “the forgotten and forsaken, and hence such pictures are directed against the exotic, ostentatious, and the romantic; they suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship,”⁴⁵ initiating “the liberation of the object from the aura, which is the most incontestable achievement of the recent school of photography.”⁴⁶ My documentation of early twenty-first century America and the creation of a photographic document of urban and human spaces is motivated by a similar interest in the overlooked and by the inevitability of the change or disappearance of everything we encounter in our everyday life.

In the absence of a single body of work that gathers all my ideas, I began to produce modular works that address different ways of perceiving the passage of time in daily life and about photographic time. What follows is a brief description of the works I presented and an explanation of their intention, motivation, and meaning.

Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity

Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity is a project of documentation and accumulation of images that suggests the construction of an archive with certain parameters in mind.

Inspired by the idea that the historical period in human history is ending in synchrony

⁴⁴ This term is derived from photographer Eugène Atget, who made a photographic record of the changing urban configuration of XIXth Century Paris.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*, trans. Stanley Mitchell, 2011, Kindle Edition, location 289.

⁴⁶ In the following paragraph, Benjamin defines aura as “a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of distance, however near it may be.” Ibid.

with the Mayan calendar cycle and by Frampton's (1974) essay with the same title,⁴⁷ I set out to shoot pictures with a 35mm film camera to create an indexical record of every lived day since January 1, 2011. My installation is a celebration of the end of the Mayan calendrical cycle, an ending that did not come with enthusiasm or anticipation, since even the apocalyptic reading of the Mayan end date eventually diluted into hearsay and popular misinterpretation. This commemoration spans merely a year and a half of these 52,000 years, and the banality of the images hints that in a way, the end doesn't feel near at all. Even if the transition to post-history is taking place, this process is subtle and subjective, and its effects will take time to be recognized. In this work I question photography's rendering of the relevant, of the newsworthy, and its required correlation to an event. I engage in this questioning by representing places and instances where nothing seems to be happening. The images in the project have an outdated aesthetic reminiscent of the snapshot photographs of American urban landscapes from the 1960s and 1970s. The images were shot with a 35mm film camera choosing the date imprint option. In this way, every image has a visual element that grounds the image to the date it was created, making it a fragmentary representation of the day itself, forming a temporal bridge at the same time that the purity of the photographic image is problematized. This formal decision reveals photography's artificiality, its status as representation and its industrial nature.

As discussed in chapter one, photographs are always temporally indeterminate, the visual record they present lacks temporal specificity and puts all photographic images outside the realm of history. Pointing out the date becomes both important and irrelevant

⁴⁷ Frampton, *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters*, 33.

at the same time; it grounds the image indexically to a point in history, but it reveals nothing from which we can gain a historical understanding. The temporal element intrinsic in any photograph has the highest relevance here, displacing the importance of the photograph's content. These photographs of places and objects are an excuse to record time; they are a portrait of the U.S. and Mexico in this historical moment, as well a proof of my temporality. Recording seemingly random iterations of reality from the repetitive realm of everyday experience disconnects my photographic production from notions of subject and genre. They become mere marks of time's passage. Every image shot becomes like a throw of the dice, or like the use of an oracle—an encoded remnant that has a link to the moment the consultation (invocation) was made, the validity of this remnant can be as brief as the image's exposure time. Any revisitation of the photographic image becomes an act of revisiting an instance of reality that is *already gone*, an image that is slowly losing its potency, and that might only serve to the origination of a nostalgic feeling or to an illusion of historical agency.

Michelangelo Antonioni's film *L'eclisse* (1962)⁴⁸ has, in its final sequence, a series of shots of a Roman neighborhood. The two main characters agree to meet there at a certain time, but neither of them goes to the rendezvous; only the camera arrives at the designated meeting place on time, depicting seven-and-a-half minutes of life in that specific spot in Rome (life on earth). It is the representation of what did not happen (the meeting), and the strength of this anticlimactic sequence lies in its uneventfulness. It is a disappointing replacement of an event that should or could have been, but never came to

⁴⁸ Victor Burgin, "The Eclipse of Time," in *Time and Photography*, eds. Jan Baetens, Alexander Streitberger, and Hilde van Gelder (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 125. Burgin's essay examines the temporality of *L'eclisse*'s closing scene.

be. I think of my images in *Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity* in a similar vein. Too late in history to record meaningful events, and well beyond the notion of photographs as useful objects, photographs become a representation of what is not happening, of inactivity or omission, responding to a need for recording as purely as possible the passage of time.



Figure 3. Images from the series *Incisions in History/Fragments of Eternity*, digital chromogenic prints (each 10 x 15 cm), 2011- ongoing.

The images in *Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity* represent a mark in the wall of a historical and photographic prison. They strive to become ahistorical images when they finally become old photographs. Siegfried Kracauer argues that when a photograph ages it

creates a spatial continuum that carries no meaning and, effacing history, records only remnants of nature. This facility to record empirical nature is not ‘nature in a positive sense’, i.e. the immediacy of physis, but rather nature as the negation of history. When photography records history it simultaneously annihilates every historical context.⁴⁹

As the project evolved, I realized that my pictures often involve solitude. They are never descriptive of specific activities or events. They are a testimony to our trajectory through space and time, usually defined by purposeless mobility or by in-between moments that represent the gaps in my daily activities.

Choosing a strategy of presenting more than three thousand images came from a mix between what we could call *collection art* and conceptual art’s predilection for the use of multiple images. Nancy Foote explains that

an important, if obvious difference between traditional photography and art comprised of or documented by photos is the use of several pictures rather than a single image...[This] immediately alters the sort of content possible within the overall work, offering a chance for a conceptual complexity rarely found in a single picture...Photos can be serial, sequential, in suites; they can be narrative, documentary, even components of abstractions. Usually any given group of photos serves these functions simultaneously.⁵⁰

All the work produced for *Already Gone* falls within the lines described by Foote. I chose to display this series on a tall table, stacking images, inviting the viewer to browse through them, but with the obvious impossibility of looking at all the images at once. I also wanted to convey the idea that a year and a half of lived life represented in photographs could actually occupy a very small physical area. An important inspiration for this display decision is Orozco’s interest in disappointment as a strategy to engage the

⁴⁹ Moore, *Hollis Frampton: (nostalgia)*, 43.

⁵⁰ Nancy Foote, “The Anti-Photographers,” in Douglas Fogle, *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 27.

viewer. This process of acceptance of disappointment is facilitated when artists take a position where they are

expecting anything, by not being spectators, but realizers of accidents...Art cannot be spectacular, since reality is not spectacular, except by accident or because the individual decides that that (sic) reality is spectacular. Intentional spectacles are made for an expectant public, and the artist is not working for that public.⁵¹

My installation intended to make the viewers think beyond photographic art. It is an invitation to engage photography's objecthood directly, as well as its puzzling anti-historical nature.



Figure 4. Installation View. *Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity*, 3446 digital chromogenic prints (each 10 x 15 cm), 2012.

⁵¹ Orozco and Bois, 91-92.

Fiery Beginnings

*These images are programmed for an eternal return of the same; they were invented for this specific purpose: to bring an end to linearity, to reactivate the magic circle and a memory that eternally turns, bringing everything into the present. Not some series of catastrophes but rather technical images themselves are apocalyptic.*⁵²

– Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*.

This series consists of nine analog chromogenic prints of the very beginning of a roll of 35mm film. These images correspond to the threshold area of shadow and extreme fogging that is created while loading film into the camera. It does not belong to any kind of photographic narrative. They are pre-narrative images, where an entropic game of shadow/light creates an area of photographic activity. These abstract images are reminiscent of landscapes, and in consideration of Flusser's thoughts on endings, disasters, or catastrophic events, they hint at apocalyptic landscapes, with yellow and red skies. The motivation behind this series came from a feeling of disappointment in the exposures that belong to the photographic narrative that compose *Incisions in History*, and in most cases, I consider these images more beautiful than the ones that are created through the lens by the process of controlling exposure, framing, and content. They are pictures that aspire to be *informative images*.⁵³ Of all the work presented, they are the only images that I wanted to print in an aesthetically pleasing way, in order to suggest that these non-narrative, non-informative images, ironically, might have a higher

⁵² Flusser. *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 60.

⁵³ Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 26. Flusser's basic categories for technical images are redundant (or non-informative) images and informative ones. For him, redundant photographs carry no information, while informative photographs challenge and enrich the photographic universe.

aesthetic value than the images I shot consciously when I was in control of the camera settings.

The images in this series, in my opinion, are on the verge of extinction. They remind me of Tacita Dean's work, especially her installation *Film* (2011) at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, in which there is a nostalgic feeling about the preciousness inherent in film and all the characteristics that define it, including all the mishaps, scratches, textures, and "accidents" the material might present. It is possible that in the future we won't be able to produce this kind of chemistry-based color photographs. Dean comments that analog film and digital are "simply different mediums" and that she needs "the time of film, the atmosphere of film."⁵⁴ The concept of film having a particular *time* goes hand-in-hand with my thinking, especially with my thoughts on film's temporal indexicality. Dean's installation is more concerned with the cinematographic branch of the medium's materiality, but the same logic applies to still photography. Presently, there several contemporary artists work in the color darkroom as a response to analog photography's looming obsolescence. American photographer Bryan Graf is an example of this trend, presenting a series of color photograms where he exploits the colorful palette that the RA-4 process can render, showing the qualities of a technology that is falling into obsolescence.

⁵⁴ Tate Modern, "Tacita Dean on Film: Interview," *Tate Modern Unilever Series 2011: Tacita Dean*, accessed November 10, 2012, <http://tacitadean.tate.org.uk/prologue/hotspot-0/item-1/>.



Figure 5. *February 4, 2012*, from the series *Fiery Beginnings*, analog chromogenic print (40 x 60 cm), 2012.

The concept of the Event Horizon is also important for the reading of these images. It suggests the spatial line where, according to theoretical physics, light encounters the edge of a black hole before it is consumed by it, entering an unknown realm, out of time, where the visible ceases to exist. The idea of the temporal and the visible being complementary greatly interests me. I consider these images as being out of time, out of the regular standard photographic time controlled by accurate fractions of seconds and frozen figurative instants. These analog chromogenic prints were made in the color darkroom, since printing them via digital technology would have not matched their conceptual premise.

Borges meets Flusser

One of my most intense moments as a photographer was when I first read Jorge Luis

Borges' short story *On Exactitude in Science*, excerpted here:

... In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

—Suárez Miranda⁵⁵, *Viajes de varones prudentes*,
Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658⁵⁶

When I first read this, discomfort gripped me. I realized I had chosen a profession whose omnipresence is creating a certain kind of devaluation. Borges' short story made me wonder about the pertinence of photographic production in the current historical moment, where redundancy is the absolute norm. Kubler addresses recurrent situations in the history of art in which "... At one extreme the practitioners feel oppressed by the fullness of the record."⁵⁷ Borges' short story proposes indifference as one of the possible outcomes the fullness of the photographic record might engender on the practitioners of the photographic disciplines. It feels premonitory in respect to the ultimate fate of the photographic medium's future evolution as a tool for recording useful information. This work is embodied by the crossing and subsequent substitution of the

⁵⁵ In a style reminiscent of Miguel de Cervantes in *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, Borges claimed another author wrote this short story; in this case the fictitious author is Baron Suárez Miranda.

⁵⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), 325.

⁵⁷ Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 12.

word *Cartography* in the text for the word *Photography*. The concept of the *Borgesian Map*, a map as big as the territory it represents, relates to Flusser's ideas, especially his concept of the *Photographic Universe*,⁵⁸ which consists of the totality of photographs ever taken, and with photography's omnipresence in the world. The concern regarding an ever-increasing accumulation of objects, and nowadays, of information, can also be appreciated in Douglas Huebler's famous statement: "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting, I do not wish to add anymore. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and place."⁵⁹ This book-piece is not a creation, but an intervention to an object that already existed in the world as a book, so it wasn't added to the myriad of objects in the world. It is an already existing object that has been simply altered. This work exists as an intervened object, a pseudo-readymade, which has a connection to the rest of the work in *Already Gone*, especially with the installation *Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity*, composed of more than three thousand prints. My installation was displayed in the gallery space as if left behind, a work that has been metaphorically "delivered to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters."⁶⁰ The intervened Borges' book was displayed in front on the table where all those prints were stacked.

⁵⁸ Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 29.

⁵⁹ Douglas Huebler, "January 5-31, 1969: Exhibition Catalog, Seth Siegelau Gallery," UbuWeb Papers, accessed September 25, 2012, http://www.ubu.com/papers/huebler_statements.html.

⁶⁰ Borges, *Collected Fictions*, 325.

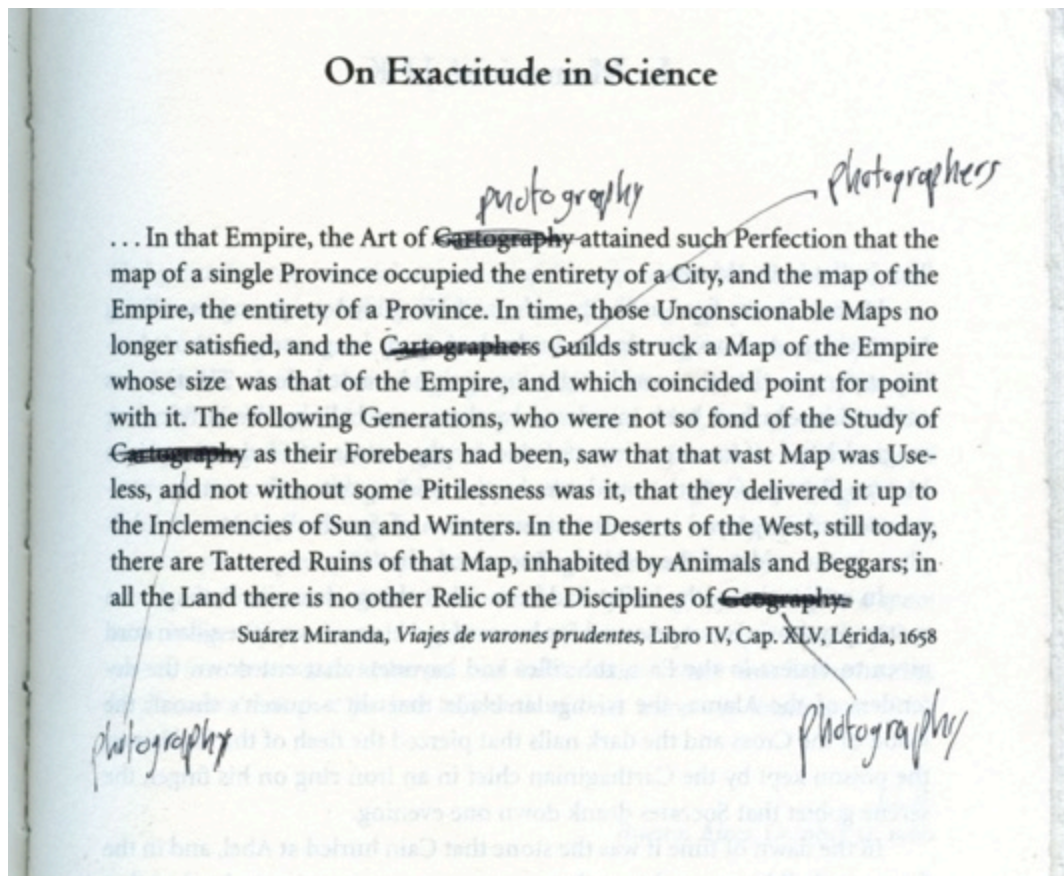


Figure 6. *Borges Meets Flusser*, book and black ink (15 x 21 x 4 cm), 2012, detail.

Time as Place, Place as Time: 24 de Junio

In this work I refer to a day in the Gregorian calendar, represented by pictures of a roadside restaurant in southern Mexico called *El 24 de Junio* (The 24th of June). I was attracted by this gesture of naming a physical place with a name that references time, an immaterial entity. The date is also unusual, since it is not important in the context of Mexican history (more common in urban areas), but it is important in Catholicism as Saint John the Baptist's day, or in pagan tradition, *el Día de los Desencantos* (The Day of Unenchantments), a day in which any sorcery, witchcraft, or bad energy directed towards us can be unmade by performing specific actions, or by getting a *limpia*, a spiritual

cleansing performed by a shaman or healer. It is a magical day that has a physical representation, a sort of spatial monument to time, somewhere along the Oaxacan highway to the coast.



Figure 7. *Untitled*, from the series *Time as Place, Place as Time: 24 de Junio*, analog chromogenic print (20 x 33 cm), 2012.

A brief note needs to be added here explaining the use of text in several of the works in *Already Gone*. The creation of work that consisted of both text and image was inspired by the conceptual practice of artists like Douglas Huebler, Robert Smithson, Joseph Kosuth, and Robert Barry, where photographs and text serve as complementary elements in the work; elements that cannot be considered separate entities. Benjamin proposes that the use of captions and text in conjunction with photographs creates “a photography which literarizes the relationships of life and without which photographic

construction would remain stuck in the approximate.”⁶¹ This applies directly to the ideas I want to express. Henceforth, text became an indispensable element in most of my work, since it makes all my statements more precise, moving away from the notion of the approximate Benjamin points out. Even if text is only used in the title of the work presented, it is a clue to the motivation behind it and it addresses the conceptual referential frame that I want the viewer to be in when they encounter the work. As a closing remark on my use of text, I want to point out that no image in *Already Gone* is captionless, given the fact that all the still images I shot display a date stamp-imprinted on the film at the moment of exposure creating a numerical legend on every single image.

9:11

*Digital clocks and watches really show me that there's a new time on my hand. And it's sort of frightening. Somebody has thought of a new way to show time, so I guess we won't be saying one "o'clock" too much longer, because that's "of the clock" or "by the clock" and there won't be any more clocks: it'll be "one time" instead of "one o'clock" and "three-thirty time" and "four-forty-five time."'*⁶²

—Andy Warhol

This series explores the idea of recording a recurrent encounter with a time of the day. While in the U.S., I experienced a strange phenomenon: very frequently the hour displayed on the clock when I looked at it read 9:11 (AM or PM). I found that strange since it was only after I moved to the U.S. that I had started to use the MM/DD/YYYY date format, as opposed to the European and henceforth the Mexican date format of DD/MM/YYYY. It was intriguing that this recurring time of the day *found* me while in

⁶¹ Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*, location 407-408.

⁶² Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 117.

the U.S., where those dramatic attacks happened, and where people usually refer to that event by the expression “nine-eleven.” I believe this numerical configuration has lost its innocence, and that my encounters were triggered by the fact that millions of people have those numbers in their minds regularly. They recur in conversations and are now part of not only U.S. but also world history, referencing an event whose political ripples still resonate. In accordance with Rupert Sheldrake’s theory of the morphogenetic fields, I began to think of this as an occurrence similar to the ones we experience in our daily life when we turn back and see someone staring at us, or when we think of someone and then the phone rings and the person we were thinking about is the one calling.⁶³ Shortly after noticing this occurrence, I started to photograph these encounters, suggesting that they were not merely random or coincidental. I was able to record thirteen of them in nine months, and these images compose the series. It was an exercise in photographic swiftness, and sometimes I wasn’t fast enough to make the picture before 9:12 erased the encounter. As of this writing I have spent more than five months in Mexico, with no encounter with 9:11 in my home country yet. It became a phenomenon exclusive to the U.S., and sadly, it engenders in me, in a lot of other people, thoughts of disaster and emergency.

⁶³ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past* (New York: Times Books, 1988). Sheldrake’s Morphogenetic Fields are the organizing fields of animal and human behavior, social and cultural systems, and mental activity. They can be regarded as fields that contain an inherent memory.



Figure 8. 9:11. Lambda print (60 x 91cm), 2012.

VI. Realization in the Gallery

The decision-making process once in the gallery space was defined by the modular nature of the imagery I was presenting in *Already Gone*. Given the fact I was working on several images, and not on a single series, I had to define the use of space in a way that the delimitation of space for every work was considered. I had a general idea of how my exhibition layout was going to be, and I had to negotiate the use of space with a classmate with whom I was sharing the gallery for our MFA thesis exhibitions. The most important challenge was to make a sequence and an arrangement of the work that generated a sense of unity for the show as a whole, and that succeeded in the creation of a dialog and a feeling of cohesiveness between them. Since they varied in terms of format, content, scale, and formal execution, I entered the gallery space with great concern, especially because I had never seen all the elements that comprised my project together in a gallery space.

According to Ute Meta Bauer, exhibitions are “opportunities to test situations and combinations, and to explore thoughts.”⁶⁴ They produce “a space for communication through artistic and intellectual means.”⁶⁵ I entered the gallery space with this idea in mind, trying to create what she calls a *zone of activity*. To do so,

An exhibition has to clarify what questions are being raised and share this process with the audience, rather than condescend with them. Such a ‘zone of activity’ repays the effort it takes to create a discursive field. As curators, we must generate

⁶⁴ Ute Meta Bauer, “Zones of Activity: From the Gallery to the Classroom,” in *Learning Mind: Experience Into Art*, eds. Mary Jane Jacob and Jacqueline Baas (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 139.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

such fields by putting artworks and artistic positions next to each other, and situating them in specific 'locations' in time and place.⁶⁶

The careful planning I made prior to my installation process, as well as the experience obtained as gallery manager during the previous school year, proved most useful in achieving this goal. All my concerns dissolved quickly and it was a very pleasant and trouble-free installation process.

I requested the back of the gallery for two reasons. First, I wanted a long clean wall where my series *Fiery Beginnings* would fit in its entirety without any visual or physical obstruction. Secondly, that part of the gallery has the video monitor on which I wanted to project my video work. I had envisioned beforehand that I was going to use pedestals for displaying my book pieces, so the main decision left to be made was the final placement for the rest of the work. The process was somewhat organic and I spent two full days in the empty gallery trying different configurations until I delineated the final installation.

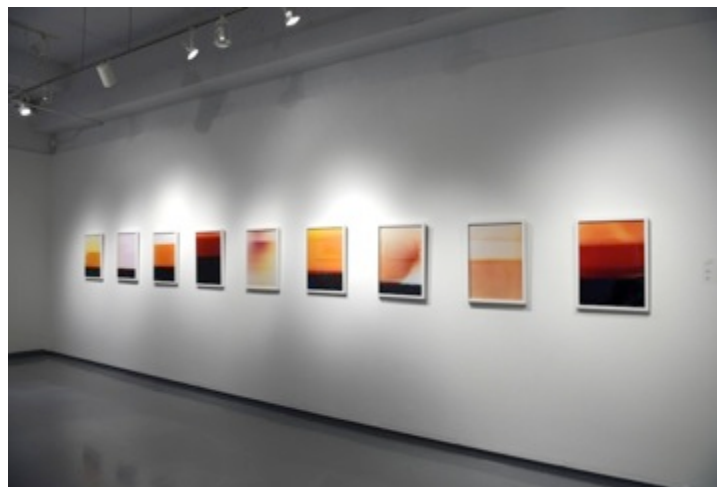


Figure 9. Installation View, *Already Gone*, 2012.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 141.

My purpose was for each series to have the space it needed, but with the intention of creating a dialogue and tension between them. My installation *Incisions in History*, which consisted of more than three thousand prints, needed a space of its own. It was the only work that was not displayed on the wall or on a pedestal. That is why I decided to install it in the smaller space, a square created by the gallery division I had made with Nathan and the gallery office. It was important that this series be installed in proximity to my artist's statement and my *Borges Meets Flusser* intervention, because they referred to each other conceptually. I was very pleased and surprised with the final layout, since it was close to the sketches I had made months before. Definitely, serving as the gallery manager during my second year at RIT helped me to become familiar with the gallery space. During that year, I assisted in the installation of six thesis exhibitions by fellow classmates, and installed three more shows from scratch working closely with the Gallery Director/Curator. The experience proved to be invaluable, and these shows were in a way a preparation for my own. I was able to familiarize myself with the gallery space, with different floor plans, with what is needed to put together a thesis exhibition, as well as with layout and installation techniques, spacing and sequencing standards, and museographic guidelines. When the time came to install the show, the process was calm, pleasant, and in a way, it entailed the execution of the plan I had already anticipated.



Figure 10. Installation View, *Time as Place, Place as Time: 24 de Junio*, analog chromogenic prints, inkjet prints (each 40 x 50 cm), 2012.

The production of the work was much more intense, and it took an enormous amount of time when compared to the installation process. Since I worked with several different mediums (text, video, and photography) and with different outputs and for the creation of my work (Print On Demand (POD) books, minilab prints, Lambda prints, and color darkroom prints), the production demanded a lot of multi-tasking and planning. I required the services of several suppliers, and I had no control of the turnaround. All the images were ready by the start of fall quarter, 2012. Basically, I arrived in Rochester a month before the show's opening just to execute all the final decisions of scale, mounting, and display. I spent that month sending my prints to the framer; printing my Lambda and minilab work; and finalizing the layout, design, and ordering of my POD books via Blurb.

Also, my display decisions were varied. They ranged from professionally framed work to loose piles of prints displayed almost carelessly on a table. In a way, every work determined the kind of display it needed, and I tried to avoid being either monotonous or simplistic nor overtly intricate and pretentious. My desire was to have a clean and well-executed installation, with obvious care and quality of execution where the presentation did not demerit the work, or engender a hierarchical reading. In the end, I believe that I succeeded in creating an environment that invited the viewer to explore the show, to question the work and the underlying narrative behind it, and to encounter my proposed use of photographic images.

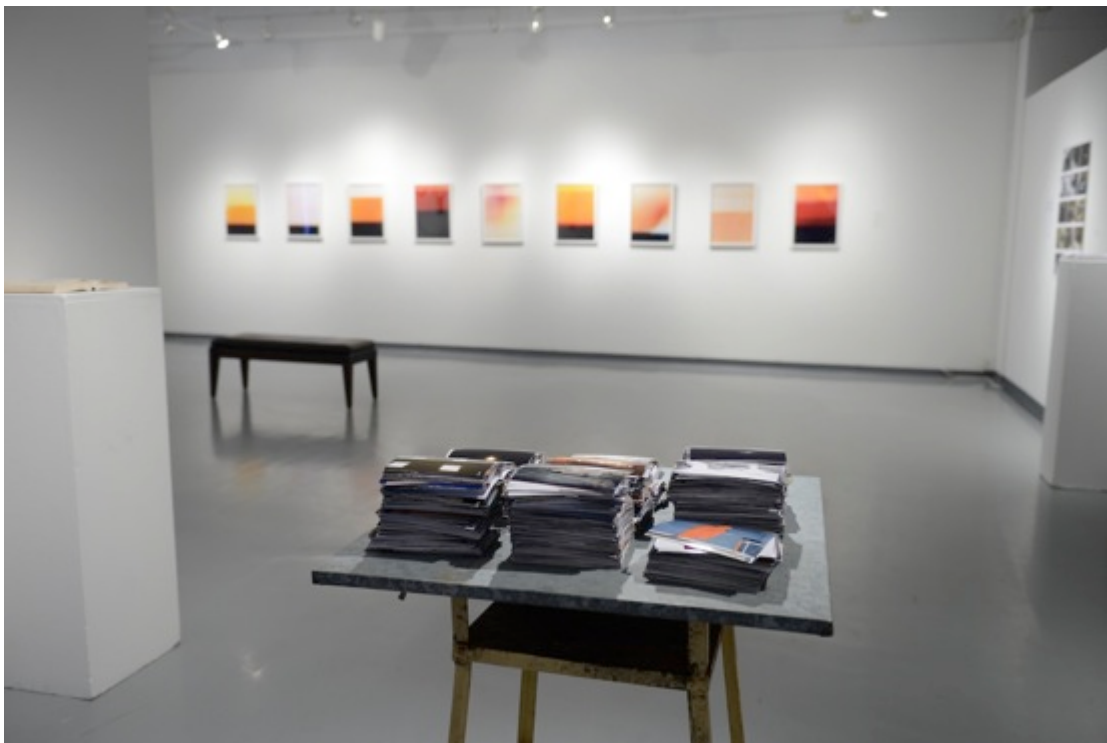


Figure 11. Installation View, *Already Gone*, 2012.

VII. Closing Remarks

*There is the stream of events, as they are perceived by historical consciousness. Everything flows, nothing ever repeats itself, every opportunity lost is lost forever, and everybody is within that stream of events. Above it it's science. Science formulates eternal, timeless and spaceless algorithms.... The whole of scientific and technological progress is in this form of trans-historical region. Now in that region, you built a machine, and this machine delves into history, and takes it into this trans-historical level: this is a photograph.*⁶⁷

– Vilém Flusser in interview with Miklos Peternak. October 17, 1991

Although *Already Gone* reflects on my exploration of the subject of time in connection to photography, time as a concept is not interesting enough; it is too impersonal and infinite. Seen from a physical standpoint, time is one of many variables involved in the creation of photographs. It is time's passage, its fleeting quality and fluidity that make it intriguing. The uniqueness and unrepeatability of every moment also give time a disconcerting quality. The irretrievability of any past moment makes reality a remarkable singularity, both beautiful and sad. Photography simply points out and exposes this attribute of reality. The photographic act creates a sense of permanence that contests time's fleeting nature. The photograph exhibits its ability to disrupt time and to collapse the linear course of historical time.

The underlying motivation that emerges in my work is the embrace of an attitude where the definition of time is questioned and complicated. One of art's most valuable functions within society is the questioning of its conventions (including the conventions

⁶⁷ Vilém Flusser, interviewed by Miklos Peternak, "Interview with Vilém Flusser," Vilém Flusser Archive, accessed September 25, 2012, <http://www.flusser-archive.org/publications/byflusser/avdetails/video/1>.

of art). The artists mentioned in this text participated in establishing the rules for these skeptical and frequently ironic approaches in an exemplary manner. In *Already Gone*, I question conventions about the concept of time and history, and about the photographic medium itself. I question the validity of photographs as useful objects for acquiring historical awareness, their validity as art, and the tendencies of art photography to gravitate around the notions of the eventful, the whimsical, and the spectacular. At the same time, I address some of photography's awe-inspiring qualities, qualities that photographs have for the mere fact of being photographs, such as their indexical nature and their polysemic quality.

Photography provokes in me this mixture of indifference and awe. I am both a devoted contrarian and an idealistic creator, so my work is embedded with contradictory approaches (love/hate, seriousness/irony, indifference/fascination). *Already Gone* reflects these contradictory positions in a formal, philosophical, and personal way. Formally, my questioning of photography derived from my daily photographic practice, and with my serious engagement with photography's objecthood and photographic craft. Personally, I confront the *lived life* represented in my images. Since my motivation for taking pictures comes from the possibility of recording instances from everyday life, I find myself in a constant negotiation, in which I sometimes need to detach the image's content from my personal history in order to recognize its possible usefulness to conjure narratives other than an account of my temporality. Working from the trenches of the quotidian allows me to give visibility to my everydayness. By sharing my temporality with others, I

memorialize my average everydayness, elevating it to the category of art, or something that resembles art.

Additionally, *Already Gone* is a way of bidding farewell to Rochester, to analog photography, to history, and to the moments represented in the images that compose it. While *Already Gone* was conceived and executed with this pervading atmosphere of imminent endings, it also assisted my shifting acknowledgement about my position in the world. I consider myself (and everyone else) both a historical and a cosmic unit of measure, part of larger processes and larger stories that go beyond my own. This integration lifted from me the weight of history—and art. I now develop my work without the anxiety that the apparent belatedness of this historical moment inspired in me before. The embrace of this belatedness washes away any nostalgic feeling to which the creation of personal work might lead. In a way, this gesture of projecting ideas into the future, from the present, via the past, reveals a newfound confidence in the fact that there is a future that is coming towards us, into which we can project ourselves. I now believe photography is a much better tool to project ideas into the future than to offer an accurate or truthful account of the past. The aforementioned belatedness is then transcended and directed to an engagement in the proposal and discussion of new conventions that will emerge, replace, or concur with the prevailing ones. The role of photographs and technical images in this process is undeniable. The future, uncertain as it might be, offers us more possibilities other than partings and endings, it also offers the possibility of new beginnings, or new readings of the remnants of the past.

Bibliography

Antonioni, Michelangelo, Alain Delon, and Monica Vitti. *Michelangelo Antonioni's The Eclipse*. Los Angeles: Connoisseur Video Collection, 1962.

Argüelles, José. *The Mayan Factor: The Path Beyond Technology* Santa Fe: Bear, 1987.

Baetens, Jan, Alexander Streitberger, and Hilde van Gelder. *Time and Photography*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

Benjamin, Walter. *A Short History of Photography*. Translated by Stanley Mitchell. 2011. Kindle Edition.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by Andrew Hurley. New York: Viking, 1998.

Burgin, Victor. "The Eclipse of Time." In *Time and Photography*, edited by Jan Baetens, Alexander Streitberger, and Hilde van Gelder, 125 - 140. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

Couzens Hoy, David. *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

Curve (Musical Group), *Blindfold*. New York: Charisma Records, 1992. Compact Disc.

Fogle, Douglas, ed. *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003.

Foote, Nancy. "The Anti-photographers." In *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982*, edited by Douglas Fogle, 24 - 31. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003.

- Flusser, Vilém. *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Kindle Edition.
- , *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. London: Reaktion, 2000.
- , *Writings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Frampton, Hollis. *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*. Edited by Bruce Jenkins. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.
- Gaiman, Neil. *The Sandman: Brief Lives*. New York: DC Comics, 1994.
- Harris, Steven and Deborah Berke, eds. *Architecture of the Everyday*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997. Kindle Edition.
- Inwood, Michael J. *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Jacob, Mary Jane and Jacqueline Baas. *Learning Mind: Experience into Art*. Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009.
- Johnstone, Stephen, ed. *The Everyday*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.
- Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Lee, Pamela. *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.
- Lefebvre, Henri. “Everyday and Everydayness.” In *Architecture of the Everyday*. Edited by Steven Harris and Deborah Berke. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997. Kindle Edition.

León Portilla, Miguel. *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.

Meta Bauer, Ute. "Zones of Activity: From the Gallery to the Classroom." In *Learning Mind: Experience Into Art*. Edited by Mary Jane Jacob and Jacqueline Baas, 136 - 142. Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009, 139.

Moore, Rachel. *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*. London: Afterall Books, 2006.

Muellner, Nicholas. *The Photograph Commands Indifference*. Ithaca: A-Jump Books, 2008.

Orozco, Gabriel and Yve-Alain Bois. *Gabriel Orozco: The October Files*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

Osborne, Peter, ed. *Conceptual Art*. New York: Phaidon, 2002.

Pujol, Ernesto "Our Barefoot Practice." In *Learning Mind: Experience into Art*. Edited by Mary Jane Jacob and Jacqueline Baas, 56 - 65 . Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009.

Sheldrake, Rupert. *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature*. New York: Times Books, 1988.

Wall, Jeff. "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art." In *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982*. Edited by Douglas Fogle, 32 - 44. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003.

Warhol, Andy. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*. New York: Harcourt, 1975.

Wilson, Elizabeth and Andreas Ströhl. "On the philosopher Vilém Flusser." *Science, Technology & the Arts. Weber Studies: An Interdisciplinary Humanities Journal*. 14 -1, Winter 1997.